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Nigeria: Education and Funding to Save Lives from Food- and Water-borne Illnesses

In Western Africa, by the Gulf of Guinea, lies the country of Nigeria. It is comprised of nearly 924 thousand square kilometers and is home to over half of the population of West Africa. Nigeria is Africa's most populous country, home to 152 million people (U.S. Department of State). Nigeria is largely underdeveloped compared to most countries in the global community. When it comes to food for the people, supermarkets and restaurants do exist in the nation, however the average Nigerian is too poor to afford these luxuries (Every Culture). Thus, many Nigerians eat traditional foods and use traditional preparation techniques. Unfortunately, the vast majority of the population is uneducated, which has led to many techniques being used that may not be the safest when it comes to preparing food. Throughout this vast population is a very high risk for food- and water-borne illness (CIA). This is greatly affecting not only the people's health, but also their economy, industries, and food security.

Nigeria used to be quite self-sufficient when it came to producing enough food to nourish its enormous population. In the 1970's, after the world's sudden interest in oil production, Nigeria's economy boomed, and it became the thirteenth richest country in the world. However, as the petroleum industry began to flourish in Nigeria, more and more resources were devoted to new industries, causing the agriculture industry to suffer immensely (Every Culture). A combination of falling oil prices, corruption, and political instability "have left Nigeria no better off today than it was at independence" (Every Culture). Today, most farmers produce barely enough to feed themselves, and little food is produced for export.

The average Nigerian family lives on a farm. In fact, less than 25% of Nigerians live in urban areas (U.S. Department of State). Large families are quite common, as the number of children one has is a symbol of social status (Families in Nigeria). The more children one has, the higher one is ranked socially. On average, each woman has around five children (U.S. Department of State). Polygamy is also quite common, as it makes it easier for the men to have more children. The father is the head of the family unit and usually tends to the crops, along with the older sons. Forty percent of Nigeria's GDP is from agriculture (U.S. Department of State). Some of their major crops include cocoa, palm oil, yams, corn, rice, and cotton. The wives tend to take on their own specialized jobs, such as gardening or selling vegetables. Most children attend school, however only 32% of males and 27% of females receive secondary education (U.S. Department of State).

Nigeria has one of the highest infant mortality rates in the world (Families in Nigeria), and only 3.1% of the people live to be over 65 years old. In fact, the life expectancy in Nigeria for the average person is only 48 years old. This is largely due to the fact that 68% of the total population does not have access to a sanitation facility (CIA).

An astonishing 42% of Nigerians have access to only unimproved drinking water sources (CIA). This greatly increases the risk for water-borne illnesses. Some of the major food- and water-borne diseases are bacterial and protozoal diarrhea, hepatitis A and E, and typhoid fever (CIA). What is especially interesting about these diseases being common in Nigeria is that they are easily prevented. Simple good hygiene, eating well-cooked foods and having access to a safe water supply can keep one from being infected (Travel Health Advice). Unfortunately, due to poor funding from the government, the majority of water supply services in Nigeria are unreliable and low in quality (Federal Republic of Nigeria). In fact, last year over 38,000 people became infected with cholera, a water-borne illness, and 1,500 of the infected members died from the disease (Cholera death in Nigeria). Cholera, like many other water-borne

illnesses, is easily prevented with access to a safe water supply and good hygiene. Unfortunately, almost half of Nigerians lack access to clean water (Cholera deaths in Nigeria).

The task of helping Nigerians gain access to a safe water supply is a large one, and one that would require a lot of funding. The Federal Republic of Nigeria estimates it will take 3%-4% of Nigeria's GDP to invest in water sanitation for urban areas. Unfortunately, that cost seems quite necessary as water-borne illnesses are leading to a much higher infant mortality rate in Nigeria. This large number of deaths is leading to less productivity from the workforce and an overall underutilization of the labor force. Nigeria's economy is suffering from all the people it is losing to water-borne illnesses. The investment to provide safe water for Nigerians in urban areas would pay for itself in the long run by saving lives and improving the overall economy. So, not only would reducing the risk of water-borne illness improve food security in Nigeria, it would also help to improve the overall economy.

Water is an input to every industry. It is the foundation for all life on earth. Every human being needs water to survive, however, many Nigerians do not have access to a safe water supply and are forced to drink unclean, unsafe water. The many water-borne illnesses that this causes take their toll.

Water-borne illnesses are not the only problem in Nigeria. Food-borne illnesses are also affecting the population. According to the Global Forum of Food Safety Regulators, there is a "prevalence of food-borne diseases in Nigeria". What is worse is that most food-borne infections go unrecognized by the people, and therefore are undiagnosed (Nigerian Tribune). Dr. Oluwadoromi, the Chief Medical Director of Calvary Hospital, says that food-borne illnesses can be caused "when water used to grow food crops or used in food processing comes in contact with animal or human waste; when food preparation or handling is not properly done, bacteria may get into someone's food... food poisoning often occurs from eating or drinking any food prepared by someone who did not wash his/her hands properly, any food prepared using unclean cooking utensils, cutting boards, or other tools, dairy products or food containing mayonnaise that have been out of the refrigerator for too long, frozen or refrigerated foods that are not stored at the proper temperature or are not reheated properly, raw or inadequately cooked fish or sea foods, raw fruits or vegetables that have not been properly washed, raw vegetable or fruit juices and dairy, undercooked meats or eggs and untreated water from a well or stream". These causes could be easily prevented, if the people were educated about food-borne illnesses. Taking simple precautions like washing one's hands could save thousands of people from becoming infected with food-borne illnesses.

The Nigerian government has taken several actions to combat food problems. It launched the National Policy on Food Hygiene and Safety as a part of the Nigerian National Health Policy (FAO). This policy will try to "promote health, control food-borne diseases, minimize and finally eliminate the risk of diseases related to poor food hygiene and safety" (FAO). The government has also passed other legislation regarding food safety such as the National Agency for Food and Drugs Administration and Control (NAFDAC) Decree of 1993, but much of the current legislation has not kept up with the increasingly processed food we have today.

Nigerians living in urban areas are at a particular disadvantage when it comes to the risk for food- and water-borne illness. As of present, urban poverty is severe and on the rise in Nigeria. According to the Federal Republic of Nigeria, "More work is needed to develop sanitation policies and strategies, particularly for urban areas". Nigeria does have enough surface and ground water to supply its people. However, uneven distribution has led to shortages in several areas, especially the north. Pollution has also led to poor water quality in cities. The current government in Nigeria "recognizes water as an economic good and the need to run water supplies as businesses, identifies the need for reform and for private sector participation, recognizes the special needs of women and the poor, and the need to link improved sanitation with water supply (Federal Republic of Nigeria)." Because of this, the government has recently decided to prepare a National Water Resources Management Strategy to manage and develop its water

resources (Federal Republic of Nigeria). However, this project is rather new to the government and poorly funded. The only urban areas with any sort of sewage system are Abuja and Lagos. This means that all other urban areas must dispose of their waste in other ways, which usually involves throwing waste in rivers or water supplies. This contamination of water is leading to countless cases of water-borne diseases. It is also damaging the environment with piles of waste that cannot be properly disposed of. To add further to this mess, the population of Nigeria continues to grow at a rate of 1.935% (World Factbook). The government's ability to provide clean water and sewage systems for the people is not increasing as rapidly as the population. Nigeria does have several groups at the federal level that are in charge of supplying water and sanitation services such as the Federal Ministry of Water Resources, the River Basin Development Authorities, and the National Water Resources Institute. However, most of these groups are not functional at the present time. The Local Government Authorities are actually supposed to be in charge of water distribution and sanitation in their areas, however, most lack the resources to address the problems.

The trends for food- and water-borne diseases are basically staying the same. The government programs have made small improvements, but because of under-funding, they have had little to no impact on the health of the population. If no improvements are made, how can Nigeria have any hope of advancement in its future?

Food- and water-borne illnesses are not the only problems in this struggling country. Poverty and widespread hunger are also serious issues. However, according to the Federal Republic of Nigeria, "If the ultimate and final objective of poverty reduction is to be achieved, the water sector will need to be the driving force of these changes." It is crucially important that the people of Nigeria have access to a safe water supply for their health and survival. The Federal Republic of Nigeria also believes that "Unlike literacy rates which usually take longer to become visible and materialize, increasing safe water provision... has proven to impact poverty rapidly and directly in many countries."

Clearly actions need to be taken to provide Nigerians with safe food and drinking water. Currently many projects are underway in an attempt to educate Nigerians on food and water safety, but they are being very poorly funded. One project organized by Global Giving aimed to train Nigerians on how to maintain a safe water supply system. This would assure long-term access to a safe water supply. Their goal was to raise \$44,000 for the project, but sadly, they received only \$1,090 by the time the deadline for the project arrived. Another project, aimed at giving Nigerians access to water filters in order to provide safe water for children, had a goal of raising \$22,559 but received only \$2,471. If good projects such as these continue to be under-funded, there is little hope for Nigerians to ever have access to safe food and water.

Awareness must be raised about the prevalence of food- and water-borne diseases in Nigeria. If the world could see just how easy it is to prevent diseases that are killing by the thousands in Nigeria, many concerned citizens would be willing and eager to donate. However, some people are hesitant when it comes to donating because of the various technicalities that may arise. Some fear that their money will not actually go towards the cause to which they want to donate. Others fear that the causes they donate to will not actually make much of a difference. This is why companies like Global Giving need to increase spending on advertising. By showing the world that they are truly here to help the world and are not trying to take advantages of donors, Global Giving and other charities like it can gain people's trust and increase their revenue significantly. I, as a researcher, had to search for quite some time before I stumbled upon the Global Giving website. Although I was inspired by what I read in Global Giving's mission statement, I realized that I never would have learned about this group's existence had I not been searching for it. Heavily funded charities such as Salvation Army, The American Cancer Society, and Habitat for Humanity all have one aspect in common: lots of advertising. Chances are, the average American has heard of one or all of these charities, and probably knows someone who has donated. The odds of the same being true for an under-advertised charity such as Global Giving are slim.

Global Giving is one of few organizations aiming to save Nigerian lives and help Nigeria develop economically. As previously stated, these two aspects go hand in hand. Nigeria cannot develop without the health and safety of its people. Therefore, more efforts need to be focused on saving lives and preventing food- and water-borne illnesses before any hope of economic development can begin.

It has been said that if you give a man a fish, you will feed him for a day. However, if you teach a man to fish, you will feed him for a lifetime. Providing Nigerians with clean food and water is only a temporary fix for an ongoing problem. A more permanent solution can only be reached through teaching Nigerians about the importance of hygiene and proper sanitation. It is the responsibility of the world to share what we have learned about disease prevention and to provide every member of the global community with the ability to prevent disease for themselves.

Achieving this goal of educating Nigerians would not only help to reach goal 2 of the MDG's (universal primary education), it would also help to achieve many of the other MDG's. By helping Nigerians have more access to safe food and water, goal 1 is reached by eradicating hunger. Goal 4 is also reached by reducing child mortality rates of those who would have died of food- and water-borne illnesses. Goal 5 is reached by improving the health of those mothers who would have been sick from food- and waterborne illnesses. Goal 6 is self-explanatory in this situation because in providing safe food and water sources in order to combat food- and water-borne diseases, those diseases are prevented.

The seed for education and safe resources in Nigeria has already been planted. Many projects are already out there, aiming to increase access to safe, potable water supplies and education on proper sanitation/hygiene and food preparation techniques to reduce the transmission of food- and water-borne diseases. It is the job of the UN and other international agencies to help fund these projects and make them reality and also to design projects of their own to help improve the safety of the food and water supply in Nigeria. Education of the people is the key to its hope of future success in food security. Without the safety and health of the people, hope for any economic development is lost. In the U.S. many of us take for granted our everyday access to safe food and drinking water. Americans have been raised with a wealth of education about food and good health. This has been a major reason why the U.S. has been so successful in their economic growth. If the same education and access to safe food and water could be provided to Nigerians, not only could lives be saved from food- and water-borne illnesses, their culture and economy could be allowed to prosper and rise to its full potential.

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